DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 079 629 CG 008 030

AUTHOR Beers, Joan S.
TITLE Self-Esteem and School Interest of Black Fifth-Grade Pupils as a Function of Demographic Categorization.
PUB DATE May 73
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association Meeting, (Washington, D. C., May 3-5, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Demography; Elementary School Students; Interests; *Negro Students; *Racial Composition; *School Demography; School Integration; Self Concept; *Self Esteem; *Socioeconomic Status

ABSTRACT

This report identifies significant differences in self-esteem and school interest among black fifth-grade pupils when the following differ: (1) the school's racial composition; (2) the pupil's sex; (3) the pupil's socioeconomic status; and (4) the school's socioeconomic composition. The report concludes that while school districts can neither control nor alter the race, sex, or social status or their pupils, they can exert some control over the racial and socioeconomic compositions of elementary school buildings and over the selection of teachers, the amount and quality of resources in a building, and the types of programs offered. The implications are that the process of desegregation may have begun, but the process of integration has yet to begin and that socioeconomic status is as significant a variable for black children as it has been found to be for white children. (Author/LAA)

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SELF-ESTEEM AND SCHOOL INTEREST OF BLACK FIFTH-GRADE PUPILS AS A FUNCTION OF DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIZATION

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Author
Joan S. Beers
Pennsylvania Department of Education

Sponsor
Arthur A. Dole
University of Pennsylvania

CG 008 030

Paper presented at the 44th Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Washington, D. C., May 5, 1973. This paper is based on the author's doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1972.

Purpose

Do self-esteem and school interest among black fifth-grade children differ significantly.

a. when the racial composition of the schools they attend varies?

b. between boys and girls?

c. between low-status and middle-status children?

d. between children in low-status schools and children in middle-status schools?

e. when any two or more of these demographic variables combine?

Self-esteem is defined as a personal judgement of self-worthiness. The views children have about their adequacies, their values and their desires all contribute to their degree of self-esteem.

> The child with a negative view of self is a child who will not be able to profit much from school. Once a child is convinced that school is irrelevant to his immediate needs and future goals, the task of education becomes almost impossible [Grambs, 1964, p. 19].

After reviewing the literature on self-concept, ethnic group membership and mixture at all age and grade levels, Zirkel (1971) concluded that

> Although the findings concerning the relationship of self-concept to ethnic group membership and mixture may seem equivocal and inconclusive..., it is safe to say at least that ethnic group membership and mixture may either enhance or depress the self-concept of a disadvantaged child, [p. 220].

School interest is defined as an attitude toward school and school-related activities. The views children have about school

assignments, the school environment and the learning process all contribute to their degree of school interest.

An interest in and liking for school and school-related activities is held generally to contribute to academic success. Viewed from the standpoint of the socially and economically disadvantaged child, the typical school learning environment may represent an imposing set of stressful or anxiety-inducing circumstances.

Most of the literature does not speak directly to the focus of the present study. There is a tendency to treat the "disadvantaged" as if it were a meaningful and integral group. Moreover, there is an emphasis placed on negative characteristics or deficits of this group as compared to some assumed norm, usually middle-class white. In those studies in which social class as well as race were considered, in only one study (Brozovich, 1970) were middle-class black children used as subjects.

Much of the literature is directed at relationships between single variables despite increasing awareness that there are few, if any, phenomena which can be explained adequately on the basis of the interaction between only two variables. Furthermore, cognitive rather than affective variables receive most of the attention. Reviewing the literature on desegregation and minority group performance, St. John (1970) stated that although the subject of her review should have been the relationship of the racial composition of the school to children's total intellectual, emotional and moral development, in most of the research scholastic achievement was the sole criterion variable.

The more consequential aspects of this study are that black children are compared only with other black children, a large sample of middle-status black children is included, attitudes are the foci, and the design allows for the examination of multiple interactions and multiple relationships.

Procedure

The sample includes 550 black fifth-grade children in 38 schools across Pennsylvania. The sample was drawn from a larger Pennsylvania Department of Education stratified, random, statewide assessment sample.

Measurement

Self-esteem was measured by 47 items from the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and six items from the Equality of Educational Opportunity survey. The scale has four factors (Beers, 1970):

1. Control of Environment - those items in which pupils expressed confidence or lack of confidence in their capacity to fulfill some of their hopes and ambitions.
2. Relating to Others - those items in which pupils referred to relationships with parents and reflected judgements about their ability to present a favorable impression to others.
3. Achieving in School - those items in which pupils expressed opinions about themselves in relationship to teachers and schools.

4. Personal Attributes - those items in which pupils expressed a sense of adequacy or inadequacy or security or insecurity about themselves in general.

School interest was measured by 17 items developed by Educational Testing Service for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The items have five choices. In the first eight items, pupils were asked to indicate the importance of school assignments. In the remaining nine items, pupils were asked to indicate the degree to which they participated in certain aspects of the school program.

Design

Two 3 x 2 x 2 x 2 factorial analyses of variance were computed--one for self-esteem and one for school interest (Figure 1).

Results

Do black children's attitudes about self and attitudes about school differ significantly when the racial composition of the schools they attend ranges from more than 50% black to 25-50% black to less than 25% black?

Yes. Black children who attended schools where the majority of their classmates were also black reported more positive feelings about themselves than black children who attended schools where less than one-quarter of their classmates were black (Tables 1 and 2). However, black children who attended schools where more than 75% of their classmates were white reported more positive feelings about

school and learning than black children who attended schools where the majority of their classmates were black (Tables 3 and 4).

Do middle-status black children differ significantly from lower-status black children in their attitudes toward school and learning?

Yes and No. Middle-status black children reported more positive feelings about themselves than lower-status black children (Tables 1 and 2). Social status, however, did not relate to black children's attitudes about school (Tables 3 and 4).

Do black children's attitudes about self and attitudes about school differ significantly when the socioeconomic composition of the schools they attend varies between low-status (schools in which one-third or more of the children are from low-status families) and middle-status (schools in which at least two-thirds of the children are from middle-status families)?

Yes. Black children who attended low-status schools reported more positive feelings about themselves than black children who attended middle-status schools (Tables 1 and 2). However, black children who attended middle-status schools reported more positive attitudes about school and teachers and learning than black children who attended lower-status schools (Tables 3 and 4).

The relationship between the socioeconomic composition of the school and children's attitudes toward school is not a simple one. Two first-order interactions were statistically significant--one for racial composition and one for sex. Black children in low-status, majority black schools expressed the least amount of interest

in school and school-related events (Figure 2). Girls expressed more positive attitudes toward school than boys in low-status schools. However, boys expressed more positive attitudes toward school than girls in middle-status schools (Figure 3).

Summary and Implications

Black children expressed greater self-esteem when:

a. They attended majority black schools.

b. They were from middle-status families.

c. They attended low-status schools.

Black children expressed greater interest in school when:

a. They attended majority white schools.

b. They attended middle-status schools.

Black children in schools which are both majority black and low-status expressed the least amount of interest in school and related activities.

The national commitment to eliminate segregation is based on broad goals and values of society. Given this commitment, it is vitally important that all systematic knowledge be brought to bear on making the process of desegregation psychologically and educationally effective.

The implications are that black children feel their minority status more intently in majority white schools and middle-status schools. The process of desegregation may have begun, but the process

of integration has yet to start. The implications are, also, that in majority black, low-status schools black children are less likely to say that they like school, that their teachers help them or that they talk with their teachers about their ideas. It may be that the "slum" schools of the fifties are still the "slum" schools of the seventies--schools with fewer resources, less adequately trained teachers and less prone to innovation.

Finally, the implications are that socioeconomic status relates to greater self-esteem for black children just as it has been found to relate to greater self-esteem for white children. Researchers should avoid labeling all black children as "disadvantaged."

Caution must be exercised, however, in interpreting these results. Cause and effect cannot be inferred from significant relationships. The study was not experimental. Race, sex and socioeconomic status, the independent variables, were not and cannot be controlled, either by manipulation or by randomization. As a consequence, intervening variables such as scholastic achievement or motivation may have contributed to the significant relationships. What the findings do reveal are associations or lack of associations between demographic categories and pupils' attitudes.

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TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance: Self-Esteem for Blacks

Source	df	MS	F
Racial Composition (A)	2	1436.90	4.50**
Sex (B)	1	31.82	
Socioeconomic Status (C)	1	1576.54	4.93**
Socioeconomic Composition (D)	1	2707.90	8.47**
A X B	2	805.28	
A X C	2	74.31	
A X D	2	319.80	
B X C	1	14.17	
B X D	1	22.55	
C X D	1	144.16	
A X B X C	1	486.24	
A X B X D	2	392.78	
A X C X D	2	23.39	
B X C X D	1	5.52	
A X B X C X D	2	245.67	
Within Cells	526	319.31	

*$p \leq .05$

**$p \leq .01$

TABLE 2

Black Pupils' Weighted Means and Standard Deviations for Self-Esteem by Independent Variable

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	N
Racial Composition			
More than 50% black	34.37	20.19	309
25-50% black	29.30	14.41	68
Less than 25% black	27.64	17.07	173
Sex			
Boys	31.71	18.73	269
Girls	32.17	18.05	281
Socioeconomic Status			
Low	29.75	17.99	206
Middle	33.25	18.51	344
Socioeconomic Composition			
Low	33.36	19.68	342
Middle	29.61	15.78	208

TABLE 3

Analysis of Variance: School Interest for Blacks

Source	df	MS	F
Racial Composition (A)	2	525.70	6.49**
Sex (B)	1	42.18	
Socioeconomic Status (C)	1	42.58	
Socioeconomic Composition (D)	1	1460.07	18.02**
A X B	2	61.81	
A X C	2	50.62	
A X D	2	305.22	3.77*
B X C	1	83.96	
B X D	1	299.29	3.69*
C X D	1	35.00	
A X B X C	1	67.06	
A X B X D	2	18.60	
A X C X D	2	83.39	
B X C X D	1	.36	
A X B X C X D	2	140.12	
Within Cells	526	81.00	

*$p \leq .05$

**$p \leq .01$

TABLE 4

Black Pupils' Weighted Mean and Standard Deviations for School Interest by Independent Variable

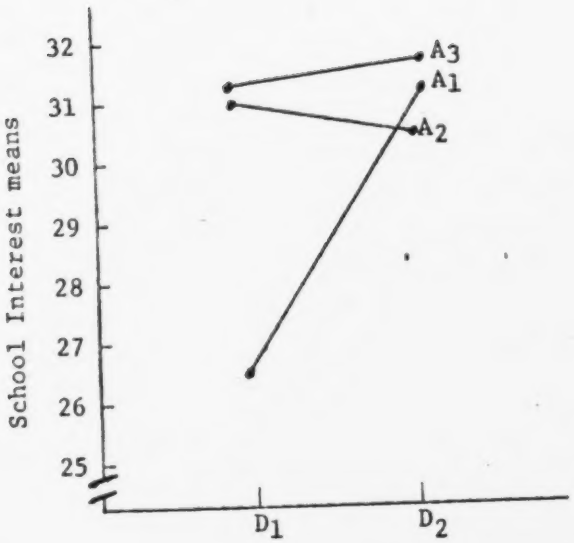
Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	N
Racial Composition			
More than 50% black	27.63	10.52	309
25-50% black	30.64	8.36	68
Less than 25% black	31.50	6.72	173
Sex			
Boys	29.02	9.83	269
Girls	29.41	8.97	281
Socioeconomic Status			
Low	28.86	9.47	206
Middle	29.43	9.37	344
Socioeconomic Composition			
Low	27.93	10.42	342
Middle	31.34	6.92	208

3 X 2 X 2 X 2 = 24

			SES C_1 Low		SES C_2 Middle		
			Sex B_1 Boys	Sex B_2 Girls	Sex B_1 Boys	Sex B_2 Girls	
D_1 Low SEC	RC	A_1 More than 50% black	1	2	13	14	A X B
		A_2 25-50% black	3	4	15	16	A X C
		A_3 Less than 25% black	5	6	17	18	A X D
D_2 Middle	RC	A_1 More than 50% black	7	8	19	20	B X C
		A_2 25-50% black	9	10	21	22	B X D
		A_3 Less than 25% black	11	12	23	24	C X D

A Racial Composition	A X B X C
B Sex	A X B X D
C Socioeconomic Status	A X C X D
D Socioeconomic Composition	B X C X D
	A X B X C X D

FIG. 1 . Analysis of variance model for black pupils.



A_1 - More than 50% black

A_2 - 25-50% black

A_3 - Less than 25% black

D_1 - Low SEC

D_2 - Middle SEC

FIG. 2 . School Interest means for each level of Racial Composition at each level of Socioeconomic Composition for black pupils.

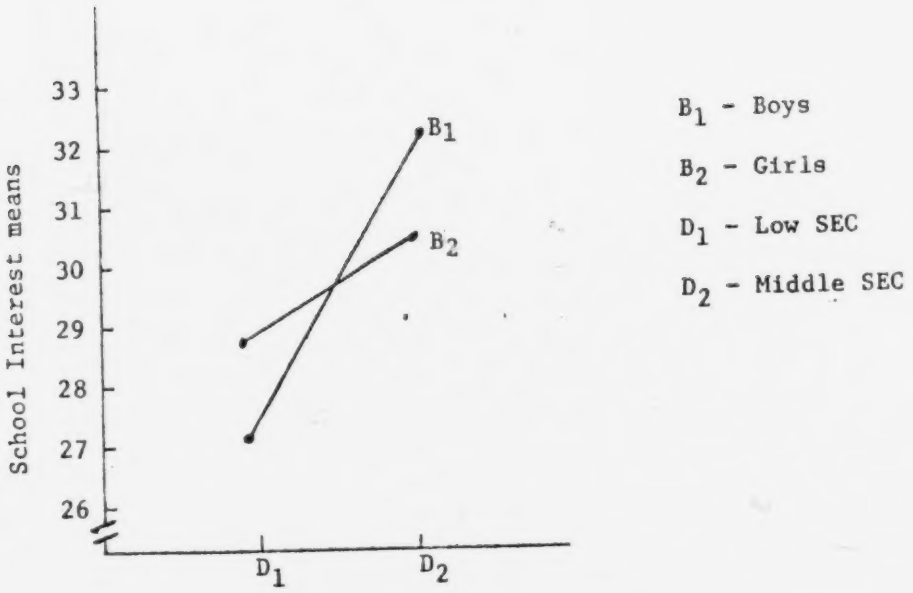


FIG. 3 . School Interest means for each level of Sex at each level of Socioeconomic Composition for black pupils.